

# Dental Sealants



"...effective in the primary prevention of tooth decay."<sup>1</sup>



## Oral Health in Nevada: A Fact Sheet

Issued by: **The Maternal and Child Health Advisory Board**

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## What is the public health issue?

Oral health is integral to general health. Although preventable, tooth decay is a chronic disease affecting all age groups. In fact, it is the most common chronic disease of childhood. The burden of disease is far worse for those who have restricted access to prevention and treatment services. Tooth decay, left untreated, can cause pain and tooth loss. Pain associated with untreated tooth decay is reported to impact over 4 million children nationwide, impacting their ability to eat, sleep and learn. Untreated decay and tooth loss can have negative effects on an individual's self-esteem and employability.

### Tooth decay affects:

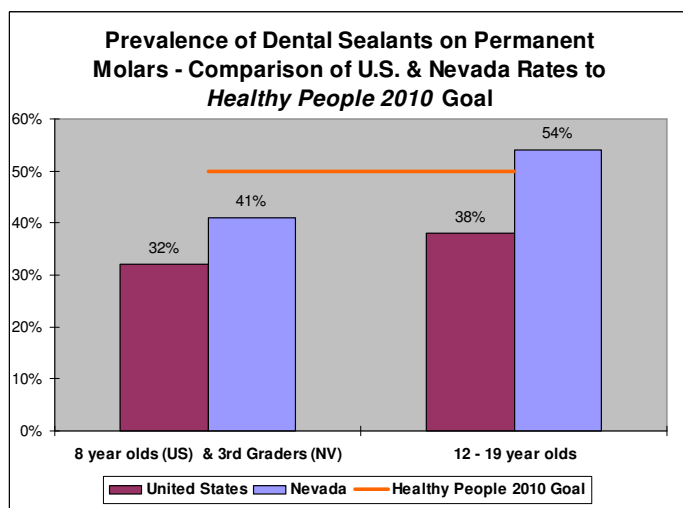
- ✓ 24% of U.S. children ages 2–4 years
- ✓ **54% of Nevada's Head Start students**
- ✓ 53% of U.S. children ages 6–8 years
- ✓ **71% of Nevada's third graders**
- ✓ 60% of U.S. teenagers age 15 years
- ✓ **62% of Nevada's teens ages 14-18**

## What is the impact of dental sealants?

Dental sealants are a plastic material placed on the pits and fissures of the chewing surfaces of teeth; sealants cover up to 90 percent of the places where decay occurs in school children's teeth. Sealants prevent tooth decay by creating a barrier between a tooth and decay-causing bacteria. Sealants also stop cavities from growing and can prevent the need for expensive fillings. Sealants are 100 percent effective if they are fully retained on the tooth. According to the Surgeon General's 2000 report on oral health, sealants have been shown to reduce decay by more than 70 percent. The combination of sealants and fluoride has the potential to nearly eliminate tooth decay in school age children. Sealants are most cost-effective when provided to children who are at highest risk for tooth decay.

## Why are school-based dental sealant programs recommended?

In 2002, the Task Force on Community Preventive Services strongly recommended school sealant programs as an effective strategy to prevent tooth decay. The Task Force is a national, independent, nonfederal, multidisciplinary task force appointed by the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). CDC estimates that if 50 percent of children at high risk participated in school sealant programs, over half of their tooth decay would be prevented and money would be saved on their treatment costs. For example, currently Nevada's Medicaid reimbursement rate for one sealant is \$23.58, in comparison a one surface amalgam (filling) is \$64.83. School-based sealant programs are proven to reduce oral health disparities in children by providing this cost-effective preventive treatment to those children who are at the highest risk of tooth decay.



## Strategies for Nevada's Future

- ✓ Increase public awareness of effectiveness of dental sealants to increase utilization and demand for sealants.
- ✓ Continue to fund and support school-based dental sealant programs and identify new funding sources for recently lost funding.
- ✓ Promote other population-based programs such as community water fluoridation.